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A COMPARISON OF THE EDUCATIONAL TREATMENT OF THE DEAF, THE BLIND, AND THE FEEBLE-MINDED

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ABSTRACT

In the early decades of the nineteenth century thought was directed to the education of three particular classes who, by reason of physical or mental defect, were denied instruction in the usual manner of children in the regular schools. These classes were the deaf, the blind, and the feeble-minded. The deaf were the first to have special schools provided for their needs, and were soon followed by the blind. So great appeared the possibilities of education with these two classes that it was regarded as a natural consequence for means of education to be extended to the feeble-minded as well. It was believed that by proper and suitable methods of instruction the feeble-minded could, even if not made whole in mind, be put on a practical level with the rest of the community, at least so far as self-support and orderly conduct were concerned. Procedure was often much the same for all three classes, and each drew devoted and able men to it. As time went on, the early hopes as to the deaf and the blind fully justified themselves. Results as to the feeble-minded were disappointing. Education in the fullest acceptation of the term has been the correct policy with the deaf and the blind, and has accomplished much with them. With the feeble-minded education in its usual sense has proved but seed cast upon a stony soil. Training along certain lines has been discovered to be the necessary policy for them. This, with limited intellectual instruction, comes nearest to being "education" for them. Their general treatment by society requires a different basis.

Education has had its most pronounced and most profound effects, and indeed most brilliant conquests—though often but little realized on the part of the public—upon those persons, who, because of some limitation in their being, mental or physical in its order, have been disqualified from entering upon education by its regular channels, and have had to turn to special means of instruction, often of laborious nature and arrived at only after long effort and experiment. But the fruit of this intensified task has been, not merely the bringing of the light of knowledge to literally benighted beings, but the salvaging of them and the rendering of them relatively useful and productive members of society.

The two classes suffering under physical handicaps to whom education has proved a hundred-fold blessing are deaf-mutes and the blind. Crippled children are not to be classified in this respect with these two groups. Such children present no peculiar educational problem, so far as means of education is concerned. Their

one problem is that of their transportation to and from school, or if necessary that of carrying education into their very homes. The class suffering under mental limitations is the feeble-minded, apart from those children whose minds range from feeble-minded to subnormal. With the blind and the deaf, the feeble-minded have made special demands upon education; and education has hastened to respond, giving all that it has had.

In the United States education was attracted to these three classes at not widely different periods of time—all within the first few decades of the nineteenth century. The first of these classes to receive attention was the deaf. The blind were little behind. With the work for the deaf and the blind under way, eyes were turned to the feeble-minded, and it was resolved that they, too, should share in the pre-eminent benefits to be bestowed by education.

In not a few respects the beginning work for the three classes was alike; or, rather, the work for the feeble-minded to a considerable extent simply followed in the steps of the work for the other two classes.

The first point of similarity in the beginning work for all the three classes was in their turning to Europe—and, as it happened, to France in particular—for inspiration and for methods to be employed in instruction. In the case of the deaf and the feeble-minded special teachers were brought from France to put the work on a firm footing. France has made a lasting impression upon work for all these classes in the United States.

With the deaf, the blind, and the feeble-minded the initial procedure toward the establishment of an institution for educational purposes in this country was often an investigation of the number to be found within a state, especially the number who might receive an education. An early step not infrequently was a meeting of citizens, with the object of calling attention to the matter and of arousing concern—or even of organizing a society for the setting up of an institution, thus anticipating and expediting public action. Donations from private individuals were also sometimes made to help advance the new enterprise. This was especially the case in the East, though never to the extent with the feeble-minded as with the

deaf or the blind. Land was sometimes offered as an inducement to secure an institution at a particular locality.

For all the classes the institutions were of experimental character for a longer or shorter period. It was hoped that as their success was demonstrated, there would follow popular approval and legislative support. Not infrequently there were exhibits of pupils to show what was, and what could be, done in the way of education. Occasionally, though more often with the feeble-minded and the blind than with the deaf, children of relatively brighter or quicker minds were especially sought, so as to prove the more readily the possibilities of the new undertaking. Sometimes an institution was located near the state capital for the express purpose of influencing legislatures.

At first in all cases appropriations were small, often being on a per capita basis. For a time in some states pupils were apportioned among the several counties or among the several judicial or other political districts of the state. In a few cases if it did not appear advisable to create a new institution at once, children were sent to one in another state at public expense.

The work for the feeble-minded, however, never advanced in the United States with such strides as the work for the blind and the deaf. It did not make a place for itself in the organic law of the several states, with the committing of them to make provision for it, as was the case with the other two classes. The work for the deaf and the blind proceeded apace till in time every state in the Union was providing for them, either in an institution within its borders or in one without. The work for the feeble-minded, while moving fairly rapidly at the beginning, soon slackened. The creation of new institutions thereafter became a slow process.

It is this slowing up of the work for the feeble-minded which sets it off most distinctly from the work for the deaf and the blind. The checking in its progress, however, is only in limited measure to be explained by the realization on the part of the public that education was not after all to be the remedy to be applied as regards the feeble-minded. Many states, especially newer states, failed to take action when they were but little conscious of the severe mental lim-

itations of the feeble-minded. The actual expense involved, when there were other and apparently more immediate calls on the public treasury to be attended to, was doubtless the prevailing cause for the circumscription of the work for the feeble-minded.

Another distinguishing feature in the creation of institutions for the feeble-minded was a greater absence at the outset of charges for the care and support of those who were admitted, though in the case of the deaf and the blind all such charges were in general of limited duration. Less attention was also given as to the ages of feeble-minded children who were to enter institutions than with respect to the other two classes—an early realization, even if in slight degree, of the relative educability of the several groups.

One further feature that sets apart the institutions for the feeble-minded was the establishment in certain places of institutions for them under private auspices, at which formal charges were made—and which were intended for the reception of "patients" perhaps in greater degree than of "pupils." A few private schools for the deaf have been established, and still fewer for the blind, all in comparatively recent time—and in considerable part under the auspices of some religious denomination. Those for the deaf have been largely to provide oral instruction.

In the creation of the early institutions for the feeble-minded, a great debt is owed to the promoters of the work for the deaf and the blind. They were in a position to know the situation as to the feeble-minded and to realize the need of some special provision for them. They were often assiduous and zealous in their efforts to secure the establishment of institutions for the feeble-minded. In their reports and otherwise, they pleaded the cause of this mentally handicapped section of humanity. In more than one institution for the deaf or the blind, especially the former, the feeble-minded were taken in for a time, and were literally given a refuge.

But the institutions for the blind and the deaf were not the only ones soliciting the creation of institutions for the feeble-minded. Heads of institutions for the insane, into which sometimes the feeble-minded crept, and more often begged entrance, were no less ready to do their part. Medical associations and individual practicing physicians, who also were in touch with conditions, were likewise active in calling attention to the need. In later times state

boards of health or of charities or similar bodies helped as they could.

The men who actually took up the early work for the feeble-minded were recruited from different callings—not a few turning from the study or practice of medicine to this new field in human pathology. Not a few possessed high education. Many were swept into the cause by a sense of idealism, and by the opportunity afforded for genuine human service.

To these first workers for the feeble-minded America owes a singular obligation. The debt will be forever unrequited for those tedious and arduous years of experimentation as to what was the best treatment to be afforded the feeble-minded, even if it was to be found that this treatment was not primarily to consist of education in the usual sense. The early workers tried hard both to grasp the situation and to do their duty in it. They could little understand abnormal psychopathic conduct, as now being scientifically investigated; but in the light of their times they did magnificently.

High purposes similar to those voiced by the early educators of the deaf and of the blind were proclaimed by those who were called to take up the work for the feeble-minded. As was the case with the deaf and the blind, the feeble-minded were to be reclaimed from their condition, and were to be restored to society. The feeble-minded were regarded as the last class in human society to be rescued from their condition of abasement and despair. The institution for the feeble-minded in Pennsylvania was dedicated "forever to the shelter, instruction, and improvement of God's most afflicted children."

At the outset there was no great uncertainty on the whole as to the results to be obtained. But it is not to be thought that there were no doubts or misgivings at all as to the actual educability of the feeble-minded, or as to the wisdom or propriety of paying out heavily of the public moneys for this particular cause. Questioning arose in the minds of some as to whether the feeble-minded were capable of education, or of any sort of intellectual improvement. A report of a special commission on the subject in Connecticut declared that the feeble-minded were "utterly helpless," and that it was a "waste of time even to try to collect any statistics" as to their number. The governor of the state of Massachusetts, in refusing to

allow the full appropriation for the feeble-minded that had been asked for, stated that this class could be attended to when the state had "sufficiently educated every bright child." Occasionally a state board of charities or similar body has caused its usefulness to be questioned in certain quarters by its activities in behalf of an institution for the feeble-minded. Now and then a town or city has raised objection to the establishment of an institution near it.

As a general thing, none the less, such objections, so far as they received expression, were rather the exception. The institutions as a rule were acclaimed alike with pride and with thanksgiving. For some years the education of the feeble-minded seemed for the most part as feasible and its practicability as obvious as that of the blind or the deaf.

In the first report of the institution for the feeble-minded in New York, its activities are called "an extension of the blessings of education of an appropriate character to a class of persons . . . . whose faculties are not susceptible under the customs, conditions, and facilities of the common schools." In a report of the Perkins Institution for the blind at Boston, where some feeble-minded children were taken in for a time, the work for the feeble-minded is called "a link in the chain of the common school system, the last indeed, but still a necessary link, in order to embrace all the children of the State."

It was at the same time recognized practically at the start of work that the feeble-minded would require some attention besides education. From their wretched condition they were to be lifted and were in some degree to be made comfortable and happy. Moral principles were to be inculcated; and some degree of responsibility was to be attained. By suitable instruction and training some degree of independence was to be obtained, which would result in some measure of self-support.

The wording of the law, applying often to the deaf and the blind as well, was, and to some extent has remained till the present: "By a judicious and well-adapted course of training and oversight to ameliorate their condition and to develop as much as possible their intellectual faculties, and to fit them as far as possible for future usefulness in society."

It is verily a far cry from the early days when the feeble-minded were regarded as entitled to, and capable of, education to our modern conceptions of custodial treatment for them largely as a means for their protection and the protection of society. But the institutions had not long been in being when it was discovered that something more than any formal attempt at education, however sincere and labored it might be, was necessary for the real well-being of their charges. It was in time seen that education was not the safest means of dealing with this class. All too often it appeared that, even with a rudiment of an education or of a trade, it would be disastrous to dismiss them, or to allow them to depart into a hard and unfeeling world. Early reports betrayed the feeling that it would be inexpedient to send to their homes again those that had been committed to the institutions. Besides not a few were altogether homeless. In some cases a request came from relatives or friends that the institution continue its friendly watch over those already in it. Those sent away were often observed to relapse into old ways and old conditions of wretchedness. Not infrequently the almshouse, the jail, or other receptacle which had given them to the institution in joyous expectations had to take them back. The care and attempted education seemed of little worth.

Under these circumstances there developed an accumulation of cases in the institutions, pressing against and overtaxing their facilities, many of whom were to remain indefinitely—through life if only accommodatons were available.

The "education" of the feeble-minded was now fast becoming but a glimmering prospect. The analogy of work for them to work for the deaf and the blind is at last disappearing. The parting of the ways has been reached. The blind and deaf have openly passed into the ranks of those for whom society provides education—by unusual processes, perhaps, but education in the strictest sense of the word. The places they attend for the purpose have no other name but schools. They have the same length of school term, some of them remaining in their schools for an even longer time. They march abreast of children in general in their school work and curriculum, intellectual, physical, cultural, vocational—except that with the blind a slightly larger place is given to music, and with the

deaf a fuller and more insistent drill is given in the use of language, something the deaf-mute, especially one born so, always finds of great difficulty. In step with children with no defect of sense, blind and deaf children become possessed of a common-school education, and then of that of the high school. Beyond this is the college or university for those willing and prepared to take it, an increasing number of states providing special scholarships to assist the blind in their attainment of a higher education, while for the deaf there has been established by the federal government a college of their own.

After school days blind and deaf children return to their homes, or are restored to their communities, just as are other children. They participate in the life of the community, share in the responsibilities of organized society, and enjoy its benefits. With the deaf in particular there is due contribution to the productive forces of society, and to its self-supporting elements. So far as the blind are unable to make economic adjustments in the community, this is due simply to their lack of an essential physical faculty, and even here education is striving more and more to make up for this deficiency. With the deaf and the blind alike education has done all that could be asked of it. It has discharged effectively and in splendid measure the obligations resting upon it. Its efforts have abundantly justified themselves. Nowhere else does it bear richer fruits.

With the feeble-minded the issue is quite different. What they receive is now little in the way of intellectual instruction or "schooling"; only a certain approach thereto is made. Much kindergarten work is afforded, but primary grades in general represent their farthest mental attainments. Textbook instruction is limited, perhaps all but negligible. Knowledge of time or of coins is of real importance and becomes of no small value. Training in good conduct —truthfulness, neatness of dress, etc.—has high place. There is much work with beads, strings, paper, blocks, etc. Games, songs, stories, gymnastics, all enter into their curriculum. Chief emphasis is set upon matters of practical moment—training of eye, ear, hand. Industrial work is stressed—and with a fourfold object: discipline, moral and therapeutic values, vocational training, and contribution to institutional support. Farm work is mainly engaged in, besides

domestic and household work, together with some simple trade processes.

Much yet remains to be discovered as to the capabilities of the feeble-minded, and as to the use society may make of them. Perhaps they may become not wholly a burden and an object of solicitude, but in some part an element with a modicum of productiveness or serviceability. Perhaps their mental grasps may be directed along lines not as yet fully perceived. But intellectual education as we generally understand it, despite the brave and heroic efforts of the early workers who sought to carry it to the feeble-minded, has found this one class alone of all in society largely beyond its far-reaching powers and largely closed to its beneficent transforming influences. Their treatment by society must be established on a different order.

NEWS AND NOTES

Notes of interest to readers of the *Journal* should be in the hands of the editor of "News and Notes" not later than the tenth of the month preceding publication.

American Country Life Association.—The 1929 conference of the American Country Life Association was held at Iowa State College, October 17–20. The speakers at the general sessions included Frank O. Lowden, Carl C. Taylor, Kenyon L. Butterfield, Josephine Corless Preston, and A. R. Mann. The following ten sections held special meetings: Adult Education, Economic Co-operation, General Farm Organization Programs, Government and Taxation, Health and Social Welfare Programs, Rural Landscaping and Recreation, Rural Press Programs in Rural Organization, Rural Religious Organizations, Rural School Programs, and Urban-Rural Relations.

The American Year Book.—This book is published under the sponsorship of representatives of forty-five national learned societies. The American Sociological Society is represented by Frank H. Hankins. The general divisions of the 1928 edition, which has recently appeared, are "Historical," "American Government," "Governmental Functions," "Economics and Business," "Social Conditions and Aims," "Science—Principles and Application," and "The Humanities." The article on sociology, which appears in the section on science, was written by Professor Hankins.

Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Society.—As the *Journal* goes to press the American Sociological Society is holding its twenty-fourth annual meeting in Washington, D.C. Distinctive features of this meeting are the organization of both the division and the section programs around current sociological research, three joint sessions with the American Statistical Association, and the first meetings of the new section on Sociology and Psychiatry. A report of the meetings will be published in the March issue of the *Journal*.

The China Foundation for the Promotion of Education and Culture.—The Institute of Social and Religious Research, New York, financed a three-year period of research of the Social Research Department. Through an action of the trustees of the China Foundation for the Promotion of Education and Culture in their semiannual meeting on June